



Setting Achievable Goals

Setting achievable goals will help you stay motivated because you can clearly see the progress you are making, reflect on how far you have come, and visualize where you have to go. Achievable goals can also help prevent “writer’s block” because you always have a clear plan for the day’s work.

Resources

These online resources provide additional guidance and information on goal setting:

- [The psychology of goal setting](#)
- [Intrinsic motivation and goal setting](#)
- [The neuroscience of goal setting and behavior change](#)

What is an “achievable” goal?

- Goals should be measurable: they have a specific end point, are separate from other goals, and you know when you’ve completed the goal
- For instance, “Write Chapter 1” is not a good goal, because the writing process can be extremely long and involve outlining, drafting, revising, line-editing, and reviewing feedback from your advisor. On the other hand, “Draft Chapter 1 introductory paragraph” is a great goal, because it has a clear endpoint

How can I set achievable goals?

- Break the large task into progressively smaller tasks: Start with the big picture goals, then divide them into smaller components. Aim for a mix of larger and smaller goals, ranging from goals that take a few hours to only 10-15 minutes to complete.
- Determine your motivation: intrinsic or extrinsic? If you are more intrinsically motivated, set aside dedicated time and space to reflect and focus on your goals. If you are extrinsically motivated, schedule a time with someone (like your advisor or a writing tutor) to map out your goals, as well as regular check-ins to review them.
- Remember to include non-writing related goals on your list: things like “Schedule meeting with advisor,” or “Ask the thesis/dissertation coordinator about table formatting.”
- Use the JAHWC’s “Goal Setting Guide with Samples” for two examples of an achievable goals list for your dissertation or thesis chapters